



## **MERCURY SPILLS**

### **What you should do if there is a mercury spill or an instrument containing mercury breaks**

Remove yourself from the spill area and, if possible, prevent others from entering the spill area. **Call 911 (301-286-9111 from non-Center phones). All mercury spills, regardless of quantity, should be treated seriously.** The Center has resources to properly monitor and clean up a mercury spill.

When liquid mercury (also known as elemental or metallic mercury) is spilled, it forms droplets that can accumulate in the tiniest of spaces and then emit vapors into the air. Mercury vapor in the air is odorless, colorless, and very toxic. Most mercury exposures occur by breathing vapors, by direct skin contact, or by eating food or drinking water contaminated with mercury. Avoid contact with mercury.

Potential health problems that may be caused by mercury depend on how much has entered your body, how it entered your body, how long you have been exposed to it, and how your body responds to the mercury.

### **What NEVER to do with a mercury spill**

- Never use a vacuum cleaner to clean up mercury. The vacuum will put mercury into the air and increase exposure. The vacuum appliance will be contaminated and have to be thrown away.
- Never use a broom to clean up mercury. It will break the mercury into smaller droplets and spread them.
- Never pour mercury down a drain. It may lodge in the plumbing and cause future problems during plumbing repairs. If discharged, it can cause pollution of the septic tank or sewage treatment plant.
- Never wash mercury contaminated items in a washing machine. Mercury may contaminate the machine and/or pollute sewage.
- Never walk around if your shoes might be contaminated with mercury. Contaminated clothing can also spread mercury around.

For more information about mercury and its health effects visit:  
<http://epa.gov/mercury/about.htm>

For information about alternative products visit:  
[http://environment.gsfc.nasa.gov/mercury\\_alternative\\_table.html](http://environment.gsfc.nasa.gov/mercury_alternative_table.html)

<http://www.powersourcing.com/se/mercuryfreethermometers.htm>

For more information or to properly dispose of mercury containing products, please call the Hazardous Waste Team at extension 6-2283.